

December 20, 2002

The Honorable Ann Veneman  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Washington, DC 20250

VIA FACSIMILE to the food safety office: 202-720-3499

Dear Madam Secretary,

I am writing this letter to encourage the USDA to act upon its knowledge that irradiation can prevent food-borne illnesses among many of our nation's schoolchildren. The number of food-borne illnesses among school children in the U.S. has increased in the last ten years, an alarming contrast to the DECREASE in food-borne illnesses among the general population, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control.

As you know, food-borne illnesses can lead to severe kidney damage in children, and even death in some cases. I strongly support the introduction of irradiated foods, especially irradiated ground beef, as an additional option in the National School Lunch Program.

Please make the health and safety of our nation's children a priority!! It is unlikely that any parent would refuse a process that makes food safer and SIGNIFICANTLY decreases the chances for illnesses among school-aged children. But, it is up to the USDA to ensure people that this is a tested and APPROVED process.

The main hurdle is EDUCATION about irradiation. People simply don't like the word itself and they conjure up images of nuclear bomb shelters and radioactive, glowing materials. Don't you think when people are confronted with the FACTS (i.e., that there are non-nuclear forms of irradiation) they will actually open their minds to all the food safety benefits? After all, who wants their child to get sick?

Some facts of which you are already well aware, and that you might consider using in an educational campaign with parents include:

1. No food preservation technology has been studied more extensively than irradiation. In fact, according to Dr. Michael Osterholm, Director, University of Minnesota Center for Infectious Disease Research & Policy, more research has been done on irradiation than any other food processing technology including canning and freezing combined!
2. Food irradiation is endorsed by all leading health organizations including the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association, the American Dietetic Association, the American Council on Science & Health and dozens more.

3. There is strong consumer acceptance of irradiated ground beef in the marketplace. Currently over 4000 supermarkets are offering irradiated ground beef. Irradiated ground beef is also available at several hundred restaurants and nationwide by mail order and home delivery.

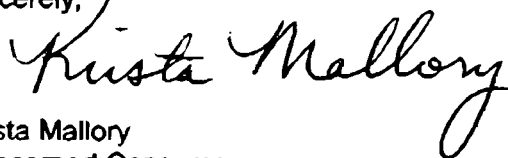
Nobody in their right mind would ever dream of buying or serving unpasteurized milk in this day and age. Now we have proof – the USDA has proof!! – that meat products can be made just as safe as pasteurized milk. Irradiation will do for ground beef and other foods what pasteurization has done for the dairy industry.

Nobody believes that irradiation is a substitute for other safety steps at the meat processing plants. The fact that this technology is USDA-approved tells me that the only thing standing in the way of PREVENTING unnecessary food-borne illnesses, and even deaths, among our nation's children is your full endorsement of this technology through a public, educational campaign.

I encourage the USDA to move forward with food irradiation as an additional food safety option in the school lunch program. In fact, with the proof the USDA has available to you, you should be REQUIRING irradiated meats for the school lunch program. Instituting it as an OPTION is a good starting point.

Please make the health and safety of our nation's children a priority!!

Sincerely,



Krista Mallory  
Concerned Consumer